Palm Beaches

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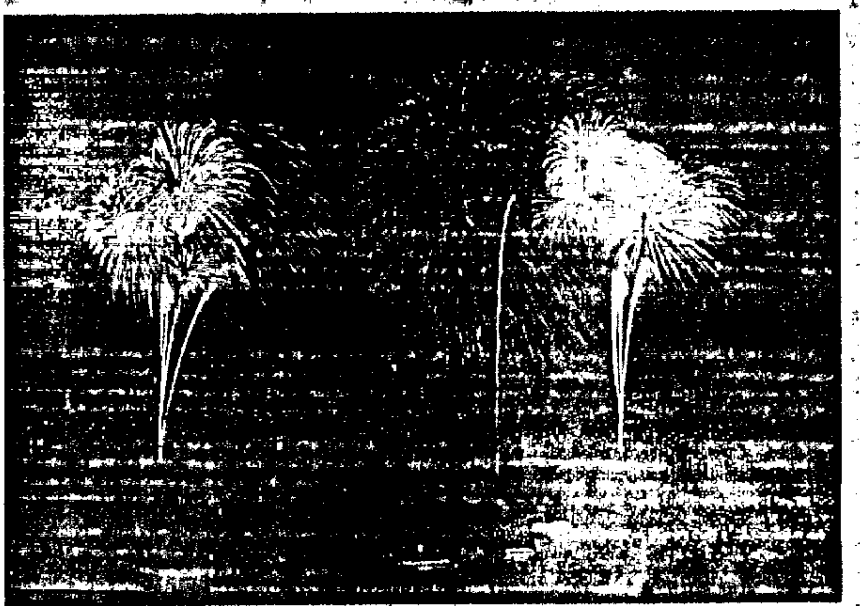


SunFest will burst with fireworks

☐ Volunteers make SunFest shine, C8

By Judi Grove

Of the Evening Times

Never mind that fireworks were in use in Asia centuries ago. There is almost nothing more American than a thunderous display of rockets' red (and blue and green) glare. Such a display is practically a foregone conclusion for any outdoor spectacular.

Visitors to SunFest'86 Friday evening will not be disappointed. West Palm Beach's annual celebration of food, fun, music, theater, dance, art and other assorted diversions will include a Merit Harbor Lights pyrotechnical display by the Grucci family, renowned for unusual, prolonged fireworks shows.

What's unusual in this particular spectacular is that the explosions will be synchronized with a musical program. Donna Grucci, vice president of the Fireworks by Grucci firm, explained the procedure in a telephone interview.

"My father, Felix Grucci, is the one who developed this. The fireworks are timed to go off in sync with the mood and the drama of the music. It's all very high-tech, run by technicians who are on the barge out on the water. Then away from that, on the shore, we have a command center that is the master control for everything. I'll be at the command center giving cues to the technicians.

"We start off with the score from *Victory at Sea*. The program has a nautical theme, because the sites where we stage these shows are in harbors. West Palm Beach is the ideal spot because of the water . . . so many people can watch."

There will be something for every age and musical taste in the program, including Louis Armstrong's Dixieland rendition of *Down by the Riverside*, Prince's *Purple Rain*, the haunting new wave *Take Me to the River* by Talking Heads, several traditional American folk favorites, Ray Charles' soul version of *America the Beautiful* and more.

"Everybody should bring a portable radio so they get the full effect of the music and lights synchronized," advises Grucci. "We will of course have a P.A. system, but there's a lot of noise that goes along with the show. WRMF will broadcast the musical program, so if you have a radio, you'll be sure to hear it all."

As for the visuals, Grucci guarantees a unique display. Many of the special effects, including the "white curtain of fire" and the "Grucci Split Comet," which, says Grucci, sends out a rain of golden tentacles, are the inventions of her family and cannot be seen anywhere else.

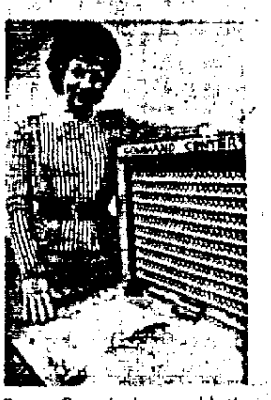
The colors, too, should be a surprise to viewers. The addition of deep colors, including blues and purples, are extremely difficult to achieve in a pyrotechnic display, says Grucci, but she assures us her family has mastered the art.

Fireworks by Grucci is a family business in the finest sense of the word. Every member of the family for five generations has been involved in one way or another. It is not, however, an exclusive club. The family sponsors a pyrotechnical course to train the 200 or more additional technicians needed for special shows such as a Fourth of July extravaganza.

Events are planned months in advance, and the fireworks are individually handpacked by Grucci technicians. Workers have been building local props for Friday night's show for the past four days. It will all culminate in a 25-minute fast-paced frenzy of "color and thunder" for an estimated 50,000 spectators.

The show will be staged on the Intercoastal at Lakeview, but will be visible for some distance in all directions. Slated to begin at 9:30 p.m., the Harbor Lights display is the grand finale to a full day's SunFest activities, including a juried art show, jazz, Top 40 and blues music, a fashion show and other entertainment.

The Grucci fireworks show is sponsored by Marli cigarettes.



Donna Grucci, vice president of Fireworks by Grucci, stands by a panel that cues pyrotechnic displays like the one at the top of the page.

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